Duran Duran

Life, Death and Medazzaland

By Lisa McAlister

The eighties are over. Duran Duran is not dead. Two years before the millennium. Enter Medazzaland. After a two-year absence from the music scene and nearly five years since an album of original material, '80s pop sensation Duran Duran maintains its position as one of the cutting edge bands that will take us into the year 2000.

Life

Many of us remember Duran Duran as the hottest pop band of the '80s. We swayed to the tune of "Save A Prayer," danced to "The Reflex," sang to "Rio" and watched as James Bond cheated death to the rhythm of "A View to a Kill." Ask anyone between the ages of 20 and 35 what band they best remember from the '80s and they'll enthusiastically say Duran Duran. It is safe to say that after almost 20 years of making music, this band's life has been defined by its music.

Duran Duran is one of a few popular bands that can change their tune with the times. In the '80s they led the pack for the "Second British Invasion" as it is popularly known with albums like *Rio* and *Seven and the Ragged Tiger*. In the early '90s it was the "bubblegum" album *Liberty* that was eventually replaced with and overshadowed by the richer sounds of *Duran Duran*, or fondly referred to as *The Wedding Album*.

Once again, the band's newest release is unlike any of their previous albums. "Over the years, we have been able to maintain a significant following because we base our music on the atmosphere of things that are current," explained frontman Simon LeBon. "There's a lot of electronic stuff going on right now that we really like. World music has affected us quite significantly, most recently with a bit of a Brazilian and Indian flair. We always have the underlying super strong melody with cord changes like you get with The Beatles, Bowie and The Stones," said LeBon.

Death

Even as the band Duran Duran celebrates its newest album release, *Medazzaland*, which will undoubtedly breathe renewed life into their already successful career, the music industry and the world lost one if its greatest musicians. Michael Hutchence, lead singer for INXS, committed suicide this past November. His death was felt throughout the world, but few felt the loss as deeply as Duran Duran's Simon LeBon. Hutchence was among his closest friends.

In an industry known for its glitz and glamour, many of those who really make it to fame and fortune are also often plagued by their success with loneliness and hopelessness. LeBon, with heartfelt emotion, commented on his friend's death by saying "I'm devastated. He was one of my best friends and I'm horrified. I feel very inadequate and keep thinking about what I could have done. I had no idea he was in such turmoil."

There is a tribute to their friendship on the new album with a song called "Michael You've Got a Lot to Answer For" that was written and recorded long before Hutchence's death. In it, LeBon sings of their long talks and deep bond. The song closes with the lines "Just remember what friends were put here for ... and I know that you're gonna call ... if you need me ... when you need me ... if you need me."

Medazzaland

Medazzaland deftly melds electronica with modern punk rock to capitalize on the talents of each band member. With this self-produced album, Duran Duran reaches a new height of sonic aesthetics. "The whole album is about different aspects of going crazy. It's about different states of mind and different conditions," stated guitarist Warren Cuccurullo. "This album is as fresh as any other album ever. It has the sound of a debut album," added keyboard player Nick Rhodes. Another interesting point, is that one of the better known singles from the album, called "Electric Barbarella," is a fond gesture to the 1968 Jane Fonda movie *Barbarella*. The character Dr. Duran, by the way, inspired Duran Duran's name.

With a name like *Medazzaland*, there must be a good story. And in fact, there is. The title, LeBon said, was inspired by a drug he was given while having a routine dental procedure. "I went under sedation in order to have oral surgery. You can't go under the general aesthetic for this procedure because you have to respond to instructions. Anyway, the drug they used is called midazolam. It's a derivative of Valium and it makes you really sedated. The thing about it is, when the operation's over, you cannot remember anything. It wipes your short-term memory clean," explained LeBon. "So there I am, coming out of sedation and I go up to Warren's place and I'm floating about the kitchen. He said 'God, man, what are you on?' I told him it was midazolam. He said, 'Wow, you're in Medazzaland.'" Me, Nick and Warren looked at each other and said, 'Hmm. Album title?'"

So take a trip to *Medazzaland* with Duran Duran who continues to bring the world exciting and fresh music. You won't be disappointed.